



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

January 25, 2005

News Release

MARKET, OWNER SENTENCED FOR SNAKEHEAD FISH SMUGGLING *California affiliate company of Maryland-based Rhee Bros., Inc. guilty of 7 felonies*

LOS ANGELES-- A Glendale, Calif., man was sentenced Monday for smuggling the controversial Northern Snakehead fish, which can breathe air, walk on land and as an adult voraciously feed on native fish and animals into the United States.

Sung Chul "Daniel" Rhee, 46, was sentenced to probation for three years for his Oct. 12 guilty plea to three counts of importing an injurious species.

On behalf of his company, Assi Super, Inc., Rhee today paid a criminal fine of \$200,000. Assi Super, Inc. is an affiliate of Columbia, Md.-based Rhee Brothers, Inc. Assi Super, Inc. pleaded guilty Oct. 12 to seven felony counts: three counts of smuggling and four counts of illegally transporting and selling the smuggled fish. The company was also sentenced Monday to three years of probation.

Rhee has also agreed to pay for advertisements that will run in two Korean-language newspapers and will warn the community about the dangers posed by Snakeheads.

Rhee specifically admitted when he pleaded guilty that he imported live fish in three shipments in June 2003. The fish were hidden in larger shipments of fresh food sent by South Korea's Hae Won Seafood via Korean Air, and the Snakeheads were labeled "Sea Bass" or "Bass, Fresh Water Fish."

Snakehead fish, which are native to parts of Asia and Africa, are illegal in the United States due to the danger of them being released into the wild and decimating native populations of various species. Snakeheads will compete with native species for food. As adults they feed on other fish, crustaceans, frogs, and sometime birds and mammals. Compounding this danger is the fact that Snakeheads can breathe air and can move over land from one body of water to another.

Half of the criminal fine will go to environmental causes. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will receive \$50,000, and the California Department of Fish and Game will receive \$50,000.

The case against Rhee is the result of an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Fish Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Game.

The investigation determined that Rhee was selling the fish at Assi Supermarket for \$14.99 a pound. Extrapolating the amount of "Sea Bass" imported by Assi Supermarket, the Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that Rhee generated nearly \$23,000 in sales of Snakehead fish in 2002 and the first half of 2003.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.